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Note on Hosea 1—3

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IT is generally agreed that Hos. 4—14 (omitting the Judah passages, 14 10, parts or the whole of 14 2-9, and a few other insertions) is a unity; material and tone are substantially the same throughout. But there is room for doubt whether chaps. 1—3 belong with the rest of the book, for, while, like all pre-exilic prophetic writings, the two parts have in common dissatisfaction with the existing condition of religion, the differences between them are great. The contrast between the connected discourse and smooth flowing style of chap. 2 and the isolated paragraphs and exclamatory sentences of 4—14 is obvious. The two differ also in the material that interests them: in 4—14 there is a survey of the whole state of affairs in the northern kingdom—the bull-worship, the ignorance of the priests, the corruption of the royal court, the foreign relations are denounced; in 1—3 it is the worship of the local baals that excites the writer's indignation. These differences cannot be accounted for by the supposition that the two parts were composed at different periods in one man's life. In the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel we have series of discourses extending over many years, but the treatment, tone and style remain the same throughout in each book.¹ The sharp variations in Hosea point naturally to difference of authorship.

¹ Only genuine material, of course, is here considered.

But the first part, chaps. 1—3, seems not to be a unity. The central discourse, chap. 2, has references to a future reconstruction that suggest the hand of an exilic or post-exilic editor, and the same thing is true of 3 5.² The promise in 2 1 stands isolated; it connects neither with the preceding nor with the succeeding context, and is a late addition.³ Another fragment is 2 3, which presupposes a discourse that has not been preserved.

The two paragraphs describing symbolical actions, 1 2-6. *sf.*, 3, appear to be independent productions, connected organically neither with chap. 2 nor with each other. In the first of these the prophet is commanded by Yahweh to marry a lewd woman, and three children are born of the marriage; the first child is said (v. 3) to be Hosea's, not illegitimate, and the connection conveys the impression that the other two also were considered to be born in lawful wedlock. After v. 2 there is no reference to the character of the woman—the interest is all in the children. The name of the first child, Jezreel, is given not a religious but a political significance;⁴ the fall of the Jehu dynasty is regarded as imminent (the date is thus indicated). The other names express the rejection of Israel by Yahweh; the isolated statement of 2 3 ('say to your brethren⁵ Ammi and to your sister⁵ Ruhamah') is identical in sense with 2 25, and is somehow connected with the preceding.

In 1 2-9 the wife seems to be introduced simply for the purpose of accounting for the children; symbolical names of children were desired and the natural preliminary was a marriage. As the wife represents the unfaithful nation, it was natural that she should be described as lewd; yet the calm tone of the story is noticeable. The names convey in themselves no slur on wife or children; the procedure is similar to that of Isaiah (Isa. 8 1-4). There is no trace of emotion, no love, indignation or sorrow.

² The clause 'and David their king' is omitted by some critics.

³ The next verse (describing the future of the two kingdoms) is probably from a still different Judean hand.

⁴ The name has a different signification in 2 24 and 2 2.

⁵ The Septuagint has 'brother' and 'sister,' which readings should perhaps be adopted.

The romantic history of a man wounded in his deepest feelings through an ill-fated marriage that saddened his life and colored his thought seems to me to have no foundation in the text. If there had been passionate devotion and sorrow, there would doubtless have been some mention of it, but there is none; the narrative is a quiet statement of facts. Nor is the supposition of an unfortunate marriage necessary to explain the tender tone that appears in parts of 4—14 or the conception of Yahweh as a god who loved his people; a man of tender and loving nature might, without a crushing marital experience, think of the national deity as loving, and might, as a patriot, grieve over the decadence and misfortunes of his country.⁶

The woman of chap. 3 is, as it seems to me, not the same with her of chap. 1; the *mise en scène* and the aim are different in the two narratives.⁷ There we have a marriage with an unchaste woman and the birth of children, setting forth the Israelitish worship of alien deities and the consequent wrath of Yahweh; here it is the purchase of an unchaste slave-girl who is to be secluded, not allowed to be wife to her (unnamed) purchaser or to any man, the lesson being Israel's coming deprivation of all the national apparatus of religion, that is, the destruction of the national life by exile. The woman is not the Gomer of the first chapter, for she has been living with a paramour, and nothing is said of the former wife's having been made a slave. There is no expression of sentiment in the story, the transaction is official and business-like; the girl is used simply as a symbol. The two narratives are similar figurative representations independent each of the other, and it is unnecessary to attempt to harmonize them.

The section chaps. 1—3 is a mass of separate prophetic productions, originating in different periods, and put together, as was the manner of scribes, by a late editor who made no vigorous attempt at coherency. The hands of editors are recogniz-

⁶ So Jeremiah, who was unmarried.

⁷ The עור of 31 is intended to connect this episode with that of the first chapter; but this is a well-known editorial device for combining a later paragraph with an earlier. Perhaps the awkward sentence beginning תחלת דבר (12) owes its origin to the same desire.

able throughout the section, and this fact, together with the curtness and vagueness of some of the expressions, makes it difficult to discover the chronological relations between the paragraphs. There has been, perhaps, an interchange of influence. In the original form of chap. 2 (which is of the eighth century) Yahweh is the husband of the adulterous Israel, and the marriage in chap. 1 may be merely the dramatization of this idea; or, the imitation may have been in the opposite direction. It is not necessary indeed to suppose borrowing in either direction; the two descriptions may have come from a common fund of thought. But the juxtaposition of the two suggests some relation between them, and the precedence should, probably, be given to the ordinary prophetic style of chap. 2 rather than to the somewhat confused symbolism of the first chapter. On the other hand the designation of the land of Israel as 'Jezreel' (2 24), the land made productive by the favor of Yahweh, may be designed to do away with the bloody Jezreel and the terrible threat of 1 5; and the 'Ammi' of 2 3. 25 and the 'Ruhamah' of 2 3 may be a reply to the negations of 1 6. 9. But these and other such details can hardly be fixed with certainty.

The statement in 1 2 that Hosea's marriage was contracted by command of Yahweh is the conventional prophetic way of claiming divine authority for words and deeds. It proves only (supposing that a real marriage took place) that the writer of the section held such a procedure to be permissible by Yahweh. The text says distinctly that the marriage was an actual fact not a vision or a figure of speech; but it is possible that v. 2 is the work of an editor who ascribed to an old prophet what he would not have done himself, just as Deut. 20 16f. enjoins for the time of the conquest a procedure that was impossible in the seventh century.

Though the author of chaps. 4—14 cannot be considered to be the author of chap. 2 or the actor in the episodes of chaps. 1 and 3, the several parts of 1—3 throw light on the religious conceptions of various periods. The people are described as being, in the eighth century, completely devoted to the worship of the local deities. Yahweh is thought of as a jealous god

without the alternations of tenderness and severity that appear in 4—14. The hope of future national revival is connected with the anticipation of the political union of the two parts of the nation (Ezekiel's expectation). If the procedures of chaps. 1 and 3 are real, they indicate a curious liberty of symbolic action that certain prophets allowed themselves; but possibly they are pure inventions.